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## **MEXICAN ARCHITECT CONVICTED ON DRUG CHARGES RELATED TO TUNNEL UNDER ARIZ./MEXICO BORDER**

TUCSON, Ariz. - Felipe de Jesus Corona-Verbera, 52, of Guadalajara, Mexico, was found guilty of drug smuggling charges here late yesterday by a federal jury. Corona-Verbera, an architect, oversaw construction of a drug tunnel that extended from a residence in Agua Prieta, Mexico to a warehouse in Douglas, Ariz. The tunnel was discovered in May 1990 shortly after 2,037 pounds of cocaine, seized in the Phoenix area, was found to have been smuggled through the tunnel.

Corona-Verbera had been a fugitive since 1990. He was arrested in 2003 and extradited by Mexico to the United States. Corona-Verbera faces a minimum of 10 years in federal prison at sentencing which is set for June 12, 2006 at 10:00 a.m. in front of U.S. District Court Judge Zapata.

"This guilty verdict is the result of many years of hard work by prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's Office working in conjunction with ICE and our counterparts in Mexico," stated Paul K. Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona. "Dedicated professionals from these and other agencies work tirelessly to get drugs, and those who smuggle them, off our streets and out of our communities."

During the course of the Arizona investigation, law enforcement officials seized multiple tons of cocaine, thousands of pounds of marijuana and several million dollars in U.S. Currency from one of the largest drug cartels in Mexico, headed by Joaquin Guzman, AKA "El Chappo."

Corona-Verbera was the architect for the Guzman Drug Trafficking Organization. He was linked to other structures he constructed for Guzman including residences in Mexico with hidden rooms that were used to hide currency, drugs and weapons. Entry into those rooms was through the floor or other hidden entrances, often through the use of hydraulics.

To gain entrance to the tunnel in Mexico, an outside water spigot was turned on which resulted in a section of concrete floor inside the house, with a pool table on top, raising approximately eight feet into the air through the use of hydraulic pumps. The tunnel shaft was approximately 35 feet deep while the tunnel itself extended 200 feet into the U.S. and came up through a false drain inside a warehouse in Douglas, Ariz.

Guzman is under indictment for narcotic violations in Tucson, Ariz. and elsewhere. He escaped from a Mexican prison in 2001 and is alleged to have paid a multi-million dollar bribe to prison officials in order to escape.

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Guzman's organization has a history of violence. One of the government witnesses during the Corona-Verbera trial was a high ranking member of the Guzman organization. On three occasions Guzman attempted to silence the witness while he was in a Mexican prison awaiting extradition to the United States. During the first two attempts, the witness was stabbed multiple times. On the third attempt, two hand grenades were thrown near the witness' prison cell.

The investigation was handled by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (formerly U.S. Customs.) The prosecution was handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys James T. Lacey and David P. Flannigan.

CASE NUMBER: CR-91-446-TUC-FRZ  
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